

Reforming Agricultural Policy

For too long, government agricultural programs have subsidized wealthy agribusiness in the Midwest with massive subsidies for giant farming operations. These price supports led to overproduction, dropping worldwide crop prices. Many developing nations depend on agricultural production, and the low international prices for cotton, soybeans, and other subsidized products make it difficult for these nations to improve their economies.

The [Farm Bill](#), which governs many of these programs, is up for another 5 year renewal this year, and this week the House took the long overdue step of [introducing needed reforms](#).

The reforms would address a number of areas:

- **Subsidies:** Major cuts, saving more than a half billion dollars
- **Fruits / Vegetables:** California provides agricultural products to not just California, but the whole world. California grows more than 400 agricultural commodities, many of which represent a large percentage of all the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States, and produced \$32 billion in direct farm sales in 2005. However, until this bill, California fruit and vegetable producers have not been eligible for many of the Farm Bill benefits enjoyed by the so-called "Commodity Crops" – soybeans, corn, rice, wheat, and cotton.
- **Conservation:** Increases funding for the EQIP conservation program. EQIP is the program most frequently used by California's farmers to take environmentally sensitive land out of farming and encourage environmentally friendly practices on working farmland. This bill additionally expands existing programs to protect wetlands, grasslands, and other conservation programs.
- **Limits Payments to Millionaire Farmers:** Imposes the first ever payment limit that prevents millionaires from receiving farm subsidy benefits and offers complete transparency so the public knows taxpayer dollars are getting to the family farmers who need them.
- **Fuel Independence:** This bill encourages the expansion of renewable fuel production that helps our country get on the road to energy independence and protects our environment. The Farm bill provides loan guarantees for the development of refineries that process renewable fuels, a key step toward bringing more renewable fuels to market in America.
- **Helping rural areas gain access to Information Technology advances:** Invests in rural communities nationwide, including economic development programs and access to broadband telecommunication services to allow rural areas to take advantage of the productivity advances that are available through new technologies, many of which were developed in Silicon Valley.
- **Assistance to the poor and hungry:** Invests in nutrition programs that help families in need, including increasing the purchasing power of food stamps which keep many Americans

from going hungry.

Although the reforms made to these programs are a good start, we can do more and I will carefully examine any amendments to the bill that may effect funding for these programs.